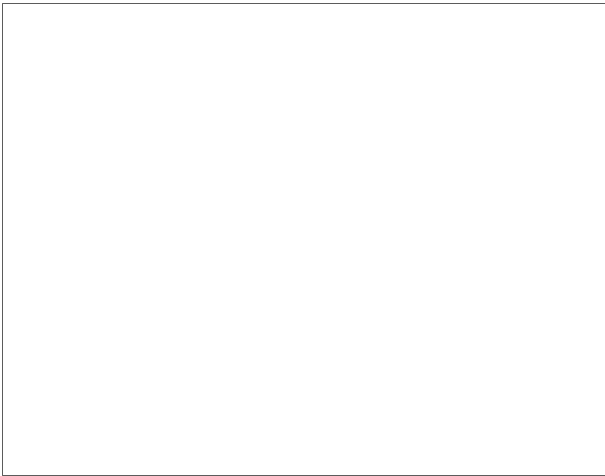


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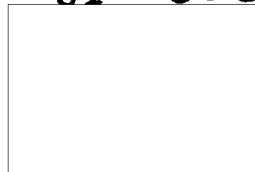
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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

22 October 1982

ARGENTINA: PROSPECTS FOR THE MONTONEROS [REDACTED]

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Summary

The Montonero leftist guerrillas were decimated by the harsh military campaign against them in the mid-1970s, reducing their numbers from an estimated 2,500 to some current 60 activists in country and 300 in exile. Presently, the Montoneros hope to exploit political tensions and deteriorating economic conditions that have accompanied the Falklands defeat and the decision to hasten the return of the government to civilian rule. The Montoneros appear to be divided, however, over whether to renew the armed struggle or focus on political action. For now they appear to be moving on both fronts. Although evidence is thin, plans are apparently being made for a stepped up propaganda campaign against the government at the same time that the Montoneros appear to be making preliminary preparations for violent activity. [REDACTED]

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This memorandum was requested by the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. It was prepared by [REDACTED] South America Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis and coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. It contains information as of 21 October 1982. Questions and comments may be directed to the Chief, South America Division, ALA, [REDACTED]

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The Montoneros have an expanded reservoir of experience to call upon for violent activities. Following their defeat by the armed forces, they trained in Cuba and Lebanon. A number of them also gained combat experience in Central America. Moreover, Montonero leaders developed contacts with leftist political parties in Western Europe, which reportedly have provided funds and other support. [REDACTED]

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Despite this, the Montoneros face serious constraints that impede a return to regime threatening terrorist activities, including:

- the lack of general public support;*
- rifts within the Montonero movement itself over strategy;*
- uncertain external backing for a major terrorist campaign; and*
- the capabilities of Argentine security forces.*

If economic chaos ensues in Argentina and the effectiveness of the military is diminished, many of these constraints could be weakened. Even then we would expect the Montoneros to renew the armed struggle only with sporadic attacks to test the armed forces. [REDACTED]

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Background

The Montoneros emerged in 1970 as the militant left-wing arm of the umbrella Peronist movement under the leadership of then exiled dictator Juan Peron. At Peron's bidding, they sought to undermine the incumbent military regime by raiding military barracks, robbing banks, and kidnaping both wealthy Argentines and foreigners in and around Buenos Aires. By 1973, however, the Montoneros were growing increasingly radical, calling for a "popular war" against the upper classes, and expanding operations into rural areas.

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they numbered some 2,500 combatants and 11,000 sympathizers. After Peron assumed the presidency in late 1973, he attempted to negotiate a halt to the terrorism, but the Montoneros refused to come to terms. By 1974 the split was complete, and the Peronist regime became the guerilla's target. The Peronist government outlawed the Montoneros in mid-1975, and security forces moved against them.

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Under Military Rule

After ousting the Peronist regime in 1976, the armed forces had free rein against the Montoneros. Within three years the army and intelligence services--employing torture, illegal detentions, and widespread dragnets--succeeded in forcing most of its members into inactivity or exile.

by early 1977 combatants had already been reduced to about 300, and most of the leaders were either captured, killed or fled the country. Any serious threat to the regime was eliminated, although sporadic attacks--including several spectacular kidnappings and bombings--continued until 1979. By the end of that year, Montonero activists in Argentina were estimated at 200. Their activities were confined to distributing leaflets, painting slogans on buildings in downtown Buenos Aires, and interrupting normal radio and television broadcasting with propaganda speeches.

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[redacted] Montoneros in Argentina have maintained close contact with their network abroad, estimated in 1979 [redacted]

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[redacted] to also number some 200. The exiles sought refuge in Latin America and Western Europe. [redacted], the Mexican government and leftist parties in Western Europe--primarily in Spain, France, and Italy--have backed the Montonero propaganda campaigns, providing Firmenich with forums for anti-regime speeches and funding for printing and travel. [redacted]

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[redacted] in the case of Mexico, for example, it fits the pattern of support for leftist groups. The favorable operational climate presumably accounts for the decision-- [redacted] --to base the Montoneros' political arm in Mexico City. [redacted]

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By 1980, the Montoneros, under the overall leadership of exile Mario Firmenich, divided into two groups--clandestine internal operations in Argentina and the much more visible movement abroad. [redacted]

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[redacted] Firmenich's decision to separate militant from political action reflected ideological rifts within the movement. Veterans of the struggle, as well as Firmenich himself, were uncertain over whether to continue armed confrontation, build a popular base to support a potential political party, or move forward on both fronts. In an effort to identify the organization with a legitimate party, he renamed the Montoneros the Peronist Montonero Movement. [redacted]

Cuban and Other External Support

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[redacted] Cuba has provided training facilities for recruits and a safehaven for Firmenich. [redacted], the Castro regime also provided financial support, at least until September 1982, and safeguarded funds acquired by the Montoneros through their criminal activities. [redacted]

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Moreover, Havana has also served as a staging area for Montoneros moving into Central America, where they gained combat experience. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] some Montoneros have worked with the Sandinistas in various operations, including the training of Costa Rican leftists and the assassination of former dictator Somoza, in Paraguay. During the same period, [REDACTED] Montoneros helped to train assassination teams for attacks on officials in El Salvador. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Montoneros were probably training insurgents in Tegucigalpa. [REDACTED]

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By mid-1979 Montoneros living in Africa had established liaisons with various guerilla organizations, including the Palestine Liberation Organization. The bonds with the PLO developed in Africa probably strengthened the relationship which had begun in 1978, when a group of Montoneros visited the PLO in Beirut. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the Montoneros may have provided the Palestinians with a unique plastic explosive and training in demolition techniques. [REDACTED] the Montoneros--perhaps as many as several dozen--received training from the PLO in Lebanon. [REDACTED]

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Montoneros and the Transition

The political and economic uncertainties following the Falklands defeat have improved the potential operational climate for the terrorists, and they retain the capability to carry out attacks, should they decide to do so. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] as of late 1981 about 60 members remained inside Argentina and about 300 abroad, some of whom are gradually returning home. Moreover, [REDACTED] indicate that the organization has been further revamped to facilitate both political and military action. Four separate components deal respectively with weapons and logistics; intelligence; counterintelligence; and political action, which includes propaganda activities and liaison with foreign terrorist and leftist political movements. All components are based outside [REDACTED]

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Argentina; exiles in Havana take the lead in weapons and logistics, intelligence, and counterintelligence, while those in Mexico focus on political action. [REDACTED]

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Inside Argentina, the Montoneros apparently are preparing to resume operations, anticipating the return of some overseas cadre. Caches of arms including automatic weapons, grenades, and other explosives have been uncovered as recently as last January, according to press and US Embassy reporting. In April, Montoneros may have been involved in several bombings in downtown Buenos Aires, according to US officials there. The Montoneros, [REDACTED] also pressed the Cubans in September for funds to bankroll activities in Argentina. [REDACTED]

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Moreover, the Montoneros appear to be stepping up their political activity. During the Falklands crisis, Firmenich publicly appealed to regime leaders to allow him to return to Argentina to join the struggle against the British and form a legitimate political party. The ruling junta refused. [REDACTED] Firmenich met with a radical Peronist leader in Mexico City, where he offered the Montoneros access to his newspaper for use as a propaganda forum. [REDACTED]

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Prospects

The ability of the Montoneros over the next six to 18 months to capitalize on current conditions in Argentina and their enhanced military training and experience, however, will be constrained by:

- Lack of public support. We judge that labor and political leaders presently believe their interests lay in assisting the regime through the transition process and not in backing or condoning violence that might delay elections. Potential student support is also uncertain.

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-- Ideological rifts within the Montonero movement. We believe the lack of consensus on renewing violence could force Firmenich to focus on political action, at least until the effects of economic deterioration and the struggle within the military become more apparent.

-- The willingness of outsiders to back a renewed insurgency. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] We judge that Cuba wishes to withhold support to avoid alienating Buenos Aires at a time when diplomatic relations are improving as a result of Havana's aid during the Falklands. Moreover, we believe the Cubans want the Montoneros to continue to concentrate on assisting insurgents in Central America rather than in Argentina. We believe Castro is unlikely to change his position any time soon.

-- The effectiveness of security forces. The Argentine security services appear to have penetrated the Montoneros and have confidence they can handle the threat. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] They continue, however, to monitor Montonero movements, [REDACTED]

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We believe that if the security forces are impaired significantly by continuing divisions within the military, and if economic deterioration sparks serious social unrest, militants could be emboldened to renew terrorist activities. Without significant external support, however, we judge they would be unlikely to mount more than sporadic attacks against the government. Their recent experience at the hands of the security services should also be a deterrent to a hasty resumption of terrorist tactics. [REDACTED]

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